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ORGANIZED PREACHING. I

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No man is doing more stimulating work for preachers than President Davis. His little book on THE GOSPEL IN THE LIGHT OF THE GREAT WAR, which in its original form appeared in the BIBLICAL WORLD, has been given a most cordial reception. It is full of material and suggestions for real preaching. That is the sort of preaching Dr. Davis wants. And that is the sort of preaching the present articles will help to make possible. There is as much reason why a preacher should plan his work in the pulpit as there is that a salesman should plan his selling trips. Indeed, it is not very difficult to think of preaching as a form of salesmanship. Men are selling the gospel. It is worth while being trained for that sort of business for the Lord.

Haphazard Preaching

Among the criticisms leveled against the modern pulpit, the partial justice of which must be admitted, is that the preaching is often at random, without any apparent sense of unity or direction. Not only does the individual sermon aim at nothing and hit it; but the whole course of preaching lacks precision of purpose. Every preacher knows how easy it is to fall into the habit of preaching from hand to mouth. The pressure on the preacher's day is heavy. Parish duties are many and varied. Therefore the preparation of the sermon is often deferred until the very last of the week and sometimes attacked with the frenzy of despair on Saturday night. Therefore it is easy to yield to the temptation to preach the sermon that turns up quickest on the subject that is handiest or easiest. Even the exchange of pulpits or the visit of the itinerant secretary or superintendent becomes a welcome relief under these conditions. Soon the preacher has lost his power and zest; and that which ought to have been his supreme joy and privilege becomes an

irksome and neglected task. The picture is certainly not overdrawn.

No preacher, it has been said, ought to be judged by *one sermon* but rather by the height and range and power of a year's preaching. It is easy to write now and then a short or piquant article; but to maintain a high level of discussion on a great theme takes all the power of a trained and growing mind. Thus it is more difficult to take one great Christian truth and carry it steadily and with growing force through a series of Sundays than it is to jump all over the field of human interests and preach what is uppermost in one's thinking at the time. But it is self-evident which is of the greater value to the preacher and the congregation.

Organized Preaching

The cure for the evils that have just been suggested in random preaching lies in the deliberate organizing of the preaching during the church year around some central truth or program or idea, allowing, of course, such latitude as will permit the attention of the people to be

directed to those occasional interests which always arise. The grouping of the year's work around some such axis of vital interest is what we mean by organized preaching.

In thus applying the figure of an organism to the work of the preacher during the church year we would not miss the full implication of the illustration. An organism is built up by life. It has felt the creative power of that which lives. We do not know what life is essentially; but we do see every day what life does. It brings organisms into being. The Christian preacher handles something which he regards as *vital truth*. It is truth concerning the living Christ; it has power to create new forms of life. We are warranted in thinking that unified preaching during a church year is truly an organism, called into being by the very life of Christ and therefore more potent and wonderful than any treatise on mathematics or the most vivid dramatic poem. The preacher is handling truth organized by the Spirit of God. This gives worth and dignity to preaching such as is enjoyed in no other effort to represent truth.

Organized Preaching is Not Mechanical Preaching

The objection is likely to arise at once. This makes preaching a merely mechanical affair. Who could ever think of the preaching of the apostles as studied and planned in any such way as has just been suggested? They threw themselves into their work as witnesses with no previous planning of the order of their testimony. Their work was done spontaneously, happily, under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

If one has planned out weeks ahead the subject on which he is to preach, will he not simply write a lecture on the subject? Will he not lose all the zest and joy of his free witness and become a dry-as-dust speculator? Will not his routine make him a slave?

Of course there is danger in this method. That fact ought to be seen and reckoned with at once. Sometimes the very methods that ought to make us effective finally rob us of initiative and power. If there is any practical danger that a preacher will lose his freshness and ingenuity by organizing his year's pulpit work, he ought never to allow himself to do it at all. But this will happen very seldom, and, in the vast majority of cases, such deliberate organization will give power and pleasure to the preacher.

The way to avoid danger is to recognize that the method is meant to be flexible and to allow room for all the individual interests of the preacher or the congregation to find such room for play within the scheme as may safeguard it from becoming a bondage or a burden.

Reasons for Organized Preaching

If there are no valid objections to the organization of the year's work in the pulpit there are certain urgent reasons that warrant it. In the first place the character of the gospel requires its orderly presentation. The pristine message was and still continues to be a spontaneous testimony. We must never lose this conception of the message that Jesus brought to the world. It is something more than a formal statement of propositions that can be demonstrated.

The fundamental conviction and the urgent passion of the gospel as a message of life must drive through all the fixed and formal statements of it to give it life and power. But also the gospel is something more than simple testimony. It is a vast body of truth which has mighty impact upon all the facts and activities of life. It is the noblest and the most vital body of truth in the possession of mankind. So simple in its simplest terms that a child can understand it, it is also so vast and so exacting in its embrace and imperative claim that the wisest man has not yet exhausted its meaning. So comprehensive and urgent a body of truth forbids one merely to stand up and say whatever comes into his mind under the prompting of an emotional mood. It calls for the most painstaking study, the most careful statement, the most loving application. This is impossible unless there is most careful supervision of the whole presentation of the message during the church year. If a foreman is required for a room in a machine shop, if the assembling of the parts on a mechanism call for expert guidance, surely the expression of the supreme truth of life calls for the most careful and systematic arrangement and co-ordination. The preacher is handling something at the same moment exquisitely delicate and tremendously powerful. Skilled hands are needed for such a task.

Again, the organization of the year's sermons is demanded by the educational character of preaching. The gospel in all its fulness and in its application to life cannot be stated in a few sermons and certainly not in any number of sermons that are prompted simply by

some passing interest in the thought of the preacher or transient condition in the life of the parish. It must be preached line upon line and mastered precept upon precept. No other great subject could be brought forward year after year and not worn threadbare except the gospel. The conception of preaching as a supreme factor in the process of spiritual culture or religious education is of comparatively recent origin. But the more we understand the full meaning and all the implications of educational evangelism the more we appreciate the necessity of organizing the materials to be presented. Every educational institution has its curriculum and stresses conformity to it. The minister's pulpit work must be organized into an annual curriculum if he is to make the profound impression with his truth that he desires. The details of the gospel are innumerable in spite of its simplicity. Unless one studies the matter of proportions carefully he is in danger of exalting minor details into a place of supreme importance and of passing the essential factors in his message with scant reference. A studied program of the year's preaching will help save the preacher from losing the right sense of proportion in his work. With the whole plan spread out before him he can easily criticize it in the light of the right relation of details to the greater truths of his message. Imagine teaching geometry according to the teacher's mood or temporary interest! It would be a sorry science that would issue from that sort of a treatment. The mathematician and the scientist reckon with relations and proportions in their formulation and

teaching of truth. The preacher must do the same thing, for he too is an educator of the highest type.

Organized preaching is thus demanded by the character of the gospel and the laws governing its effective presentation. But there are other warrants for it in the practical needs of the preacher himself. There is an emotional factor in all preaching. On the amount and quality of this no small degree of the sermon's final effectiveness will depend. If the organization of his work were to rob the preacher of this mighty power it would be a mistake to attempt it. But it need not do so; indeed, it is possible to keep all the glow of spirit which is essential to preaching and have the year's work fully organized.

The help of the Holy Spirit has been promised to the preacher and he may rely joyfully upon it; but the work of the Holy Spirit is helped and not hindered by a program, when it is comprehensive and elastic.

Note how the planning of the year's preaching is to the advantage of the preacher as a workman or craftsman. Again we are to reckon with the difference that has sometimes been urged between the literary artist and the preacher. It looks at first glance as if they were in entirely different classes. The preacher depends upon inspiration and passion in giving a message that is spontaneous; the literary artist is deliberate and methodical in the use of the tools of his craft. But this becomes a false distinction if it is pressed too far. The preacher is also an artist; he works with materials and he seeks desired ends of impression and inspiration. The preacher is an artist working with the

most delicate and sensitive and potent materials; but he is also a craftsman. Imagine an architect designing one room at a time and building it according to the last book he had read or the most recent emotion that he had experienced! A building must possess unity of design and harmony of structure. In the same manner the preacher must plan the year's preaching. Otherwise he will often botch his work, making it ugly and ineffective.

A plan for the year's output will help guide and steady the preacher in his thinking. Every preacher needs the practical incentive of some definite objective to guide him and keep him at work as he thinks through the great problems of life both for his people and with them. It is easy to fall into the habit of giving a weekly exhortation which soon runs dry and becomes powerless. Sermons must be full of the results of definite and heroic thinking. No adequate grasp of the meaning of the gospel in its full application to the complex and bewildering field of modern life is possible unless the preacher has gone to the root of the whole vast matter and spent time and energy in honest thought. Therefore any plan which unifies the subjects on which he thinks and puts pressure upon him "to see life steadily and see it whole" is essential to his best work.

Another point at which the organization of the year's preaching will help the preacher is by giving him the confidence and certainty of attack that comes from precision of purpose. When one feels that he has a great subject in hand and that he is giving sufficient time to its study and presentation he wins a certain

definite confidence and joy in his work which enables him to carry himself through his work with courage and command. It is that inevitable temper of resolution and expectation that always grows out of the sense of a large task and pressing responsibility. The way to get good work out of ourselves is to put a big program before our minds. We respond to the call of the great and heroic, and we find that we are doing what we had before thought impossible when we face something so noble that it calls every energy of our being into action. So the gospel message gains striking power when we put behind it an organized program of presentation.

Practically the same considerations make the organization of the year's preaching necessary when we consider the congregation. The people must be guided and stimulated to think as well as to feel and to act. How many times a criticism is heard in such terms as these: "I do not get any new ideas from the sermons!" Day after day there are the same honest exhortations; Sunday by Sunday the preacher seeks to arouse the same emotions and plead for the same "reconsecration"; but the foundations for deep feeling and resolute decision are not laid in a mental grasp of the matter which is essential to all permanent action. And a congregation cannot be guided into any right view of the meaning of life and the value of the gospel by preaching at random. Preachers often fail to consider the fact that the congregation has the right to claim intellectual leadership from them. Methods which are of worth to the mental habits of the preacher himself will be of value to the congregation also.

Another respect in which organized preaching is vital to the welfare of the congregation is in pointing out in a comprehensive way the application of the gospel to the life of the people. If Christ is to become the Redeemer of the world the full meaning of that redemption must be set forth. This calls for the most carefully planned inspiration and guidance on the part of the preacher. When a woman came very late to service and asked the usher, "Is the sermon done?" he replied, "No, it is only said." To make the truth in the sermon so vital and commanding that it passes over from *saying* to *doing* calls for imperial thinking, an expression which never can be satisfied by preaching sermons according to the occasion in the community and the mood of the preacher. The whole business of preaching must be evaluated, studied, and organized in a better way. The final victory of Christianity will not be won because it is eloquently preached but because it is splendidly lived. The burden rests where it always has rested, on the congregation. It has the right to demand the best possible guidance from the pulpit.

Purposes Governing the Organization of Preaching

These are summed up in one general statement: the purpose in organizing one's preaching is to secure thereby the more effective presentation of the gospel in its claim upon the whole life of man. This includes, therefore, the explanation of the Scripture, the setting forth of the good news of Christ, the unfolding of the great doctrines of Christianity as they have flowed from the experience of

Christians under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the application of the gospel to all departments of life. These different factors will be stressed at different times in the life of a parish and the work of a preacher. In general, however, they sum up the purpose of Christian preaching. It issues finally, like the plea of the lawyer, in the attempt to secure a verdict in favor of the message that has been delivered. Thus there is an intensely practical purpose in organizing preaching. It is for the specific end of gaining allegiance to Christ on the part of those who hear the message.

When to Organize the Year's Preaching

Almost all preachers enjoy a vacation in the summer. Before the beginning of this period church work generally becomes less exacting. The results of the past season's activity can be reckoned up with a fair degree of accuracy. Either before the vacation begins or at the last of the vacation itself is the best time to plan for the pulpit work of the year. The program must be made in full light of the situation in the parish; and it is often the case that the minister is not able to see his task clearly when he is close to it. He gets a far better perspective when he is away from his work and has rested for a fortnight. Then he can pick up the notes that he had made before leaving home and will feel fresh for the survey of his task. This does not mean that he should spend his vacation time lugging his shop around with him. One can think on such matters while enjoying a rest from the pressure of parish and pulpit. A vacation does not imply a mental

vacuum. No employment of time and opportunity is more profitable than the use of a few hours during the last days of the vacation period in planning out the preaching of the year to come. The notes that one makes in the forest, at the shore, or in the country at such a time give guidance and joy during the whole year. Almost without fail the close of the vacation period or the first few days after one returns home finds the creative mood at its best. Then organize the year's preaching.

Scope of the Plan

How many Sundays should be included in the plan? Every year the number of days that are set aside or called for in the interests of causes that concern the community increases. If a preacher were to yield all the days that are requested he would change his pulpit into a platform for the championship of causes or the appeal for funds for reform and welfare movements. Someone must call a halt soon if there are to be any Sundays left for the old-fashioned Christian practice of preaching the gospel.

The following occasions have won more or less recognition in the calendar of the preacher in the modern pulpit: Labor Day, Education Sunday, Rally Day, Prison Sunday, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day, Day of Prayer for Colleges and Schools, Lincoln's Birthday, Washington's Birthday, Palm Sunday, Easter Sunday, Mother's Day, Memorial Day, Children's Sunday, Independence Day. This makes sixteen special occasions which will claim attention as one looks ahead to the sermons that must be prepared to meet the year in the pulpit.

In addition there will be other occasions, such as the call for a community charity or reform movement, to which the preacher must respond. But we have estimated that sixteen occasions will be sufficient to meet the need in the majority of cases. Allowing four Sundays for vacation, which is probably about the average, but which is not too much in view of the small estimate made for occasional sermons, we find that a preacher must plan for thirty-two Sundays. On these he will endeavor to preach sermons that are unified and organized according to some large general subject or plan, and thus move, in spite of the interruptions that arise in the progress of the church year, toward the great end of the preacher's work, the winning of men to Christ and their enlistment in service for him.

In the following sections, therefore, we shall gather thirty-two sermon texts and subjects around either the Christian and church year or a large general subject. We do not suggest that these should necessarily be followed as they are arranged and presented; but they will at least serve as models for the organizations of the year's preaching. Before doing this, however, we shall run briefly through the sixteen occasions indicated above, making certain suggestions regarding appropriate texts for use in preaching as these days occur.

Concerning the sermon suggestions that are given in these studies a few words are necessary. In the first place they are not intended to be sermon outlines in the form of crutches for the indolent preacher. They are not de-

signed to save the preacher from doing his own thinking or making his own outlines. He must do all this for himself in the case of every sermon that has life and vigor in it.

These suggestions are intended to be what Professor Arthur S. Hoyt calls "seed-thoughts." Concerning these he says:

The seed-thought is first. It may be a single text or truth, sharp and clear and authoritative, demanding utterance, from which you cannot escape. Some would say that a word of God always carries this sign of authority. It must find you and possess you before you have a right to speak. How it comes you may not always know, placed in your mind by the Spirit, caught from some daily study and experience, as the seed is put into the earth in a thousand ways. You uncover the rock, a little soil gathers upon it, and forthwith the seed springs up. You can trace the sermons of Phillips Brooks back to the seed-thoughts of his wide reading and meditation in his seminary days.¹

That is, we have sought to start trains of thought and to provoke earnest individual wrestling with the subject by the suggestions that are offered in relation to the texts that are suggested or the subjects for sermons proposed.

We cannot insist too strongly upon the fact that there is no substitute to be found for the preacher's own wrestling with his text and subject in order that he may provide the body of his discourse, the material for his sermon. But everyone knows how much help may lie in a suggestion if it is made clearly. We are able to run swiftly on the track of new lines of thought when once we are started by a suggestion that has

¹ *The Work of Preaching* (1917), p. 89

initial power in it to drive us swiftly forward. The first movement we may owe to someone else; the whole progress of our thinking is our own, and the final product is our possession because we have thought our way through the whole proposition. At the same time we owe the seed-thought to something that came to us from our observation, reading, or reflection.

It is not an easy matter to put a seed-thought into such form that it can be accurately and quickly laid hold of by anyone else. We have tried to put the suggestions with such graphic clearness as we could command; but we are aware of the fact that we may have utterly failed to make clear what has seemed to us a lucid suggestion. Language at best is a frail medium to stand the strain that is put upon it so often.

Occasional Sermons

The sixteen occasions just enumerated do not cover all the days that are demanded in recognition of the popular, national, and sacred holidays and holy days; but undoubtedly the number is enough to cover those Sundays that will be devoted to occasional preaching in those churches that do not observe any considerable number of saints' days. We proceed therefore to survey this list of sixteen especial occasions which will be reckoned with, if not every year at least often, in making up the sermons of the church year.

The occasional sermon has always been recognized as a distinct type of discourse. While every sermon is in at least a remote way affected by the occasion on which it is delivered, a true "occasional sermon" has its method of

treatment primarily determined by the demands of the situation into which it is set.

The real worth of the occasional sermon is determined by the way in which its timeless message is fitted into the time when it is spoken. Therefore unusual skill is required of the preacher on an occasion. He must do something more than to glorify the occasion; he must speak to a deeper mood than the one that is called out for the moment by the event. He has a truth which he must "speak home to the heart" of the occasion; and so he must be sensitive on the one hand to his eternal message and on the other to the appropriateness of the method in view of the event. To keep one's balance in this delicate situation involves insight and workmanship of a rare sort in making and delivering a sermon. It is, however, one of the most attractive styles of preaching and one which every preacher must master, since the annual occasions to which he must fit his message are so many. We now turn to some of these.

Preaching on Labor Sunday

In 1894 the first Monday in September was made a national holiday to be "celebrated and known as Labor's Holiday." It is commonly known as Labor Day; and the churches have recognized the preceding Sunday as a time when the dignity of labor is fittingly recognized by such changes in the details of public worship as are appropriate. Therefore the preacher must settle in his own mind the principles that should guide him in preaching on the subject of labor.

The fact that the issues involved are so strained makes it imperative that the sermon should never be partisan. The industrial process is complicated; labor is only one factor in it. Wage-earners have their rights; but so have capitalists; and, still more, so have the consumers who are the forgotten factors in current discussions of the subject.

The church has no right to take up and champion exclusively the claims of any one of these factors. On Labor Sunday the Bible lesson, hymns, prayers, and sermon ought to reflect the preacher's sympathy with the partners in the process of industry and also the consciousness that the consumers have their stake in the whole concern. It is not the part of the preacher to be a partisan. The following suggestions are meant to be considered in this temper.

Suggestions for subjects and fresh material for use in the development of the sermon appropriate to Labor Sunday are generally furnished every year by the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America. If this does not come in season a request to the office will generally bring subject-matter that is timely and appropriate.¹

The following texts and subjects fit this occasion:

1. THE LAW OF THE HOLY WORKDAY

"Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work" (Exod. 20:9).

The law of the holy Sabbath is rightly emphasized; but the law of the six holy workdays is equally divine. We are to work first and then to rest; and in working as well as in resting we are to honor God. Therefore the six days must be given to honest and diligent work; we are com-

manded to do *all* our work in these days and therefore we may not slack our effort. All flying hours must be packed with golden deeds.

2. SLACKERS AND DESTROYERS

"He that is slack in his work
Is brother to him that is a destroyer"

(Prov. 18:9).

The Great War gave us new ideas concerning the cowardice of the slacker and the wantonness of the destroyer. We learned to condemn destruction that took away our right to possess and enjoy the good gifts of the earth that God has given men for their common wealth. He who destroys them is the enemy of mankind.

But the slacker is also the destroyer. He squanders our time and materials; he robs his comrades of their just right to the product of his labor. "If my hand slackened I should rob God," George Eliot causes Stradivarius to say.

3. THE BEATITUDE OF A HEALTHY APPETITE

"The appetite of the laboring man
laboreth for him;

For his mouth urgeth him thereto"

(Prov. 16:26).

We need steady spurs to work. A healthy appetite is the constant urge to honest labor. Hunger is not a curse; its regular recurrence is not a misfortune. It may be changed into a curse if it is made the cause of complaint or fretfulness. The secret of happy labor is to take the urgency of physical hunger and change it into an incentive to hard and uncomplaining toil.

4. THE INHERITANCE OF LABOR

"Others have labored, and ye are entered into their labor" (John 4:38).

The intimate and unbreakable relation of the world's workers is one of the sublime facts about life. We are so knit up with

¹ 105 E. Twenty-second St., New York City.

one another that we cannot escape the mutual obligations in which we stand.

This makes us grateful to others for all that they have done for us. Our homes, books, schools, institutions, and entire civilization have been given to us by the toil of others.

This makes us diligent and happy while we try to make a better world possible for those who will come after us. It is easier to work hard when we may be sure that we are contributing to the total comfort and safety and love which others will enjoy when we are gone.

5. DIVIDING THE REWARDS OF INDUSTRY

"The husbandman that laboreth must be the first to partake of the fruits" (Tim. 2:6).

This simple and sensible rule of agricultural life is equally valid, although much more difficult to apply under the modern complex factory system. Those who create wealth have the first claim upon it.

Wealth is the joint product of labor and capital. Each has a share in it and a claim upon it. The division must be mutual and just. The Christian principle recognizes the joint stakes of the partners, insists upon a just division, and declares that those who give most in the process shall receive most in the division.

Preaching on Education Sunday

The Sunday before the opening of the public schools has come into general recognition as one of the especial days which deserve recognition by the church in public worship. Sometimes this is the same date as Labor Sunday, in which case the observance may be placed at another time. It may not be wise to preach on the general subject of education each year; but certainly the matter deserves attention in the pulpit at least every second year.

The relation of the schools to the church is a difficult subject; but there are certain tendencies in American life today which seem to indicate that their relations will be adjusted better in the future. It seems altogether likely that the churches will be asked to undertake some of the work of religious instruction that is now so neglected by the public schools. To suggest such feasible plans may be one of the purposes in the sermon preached on Education Sunday.

Again, this sermon may well point out the relation between education and religion. It has been said so often that ignorance is the mother of devotion, that we are inclined to accept it without question. But actually it is not so. There can be no true devotion that rests permanently on ignorance. Education is the ally of religion and not its foe. Superstition cannot promote the life of faith. We want to know the truth that it may make us free. Faith is not mere assent to absurdities. Therefore it is necessary to maintain the place of education as the guarantor of religion.

Again, the sermon preached on Education Sunday may well stress the fact that religion is tested by the way in which it enables a student to do good work. We ought to bring the energies of religion into daily life and to affirm that our consciousness of obligation to God helps us prepare difficult lessons, do good work when we are not watched, and follow the leading of truth wherever it may take us. So the sermon may be made specific and practical.

Once more, this sermon may exalt the true worth of the scholar and his contribution to life. The self-sacrifice and

high ideals of the world's great scholars ought to be used in order to show students that they are engaged in a great task, as noble as invention, discovery, or even unselfish service to the highest life of mankind.

These are some of the dominant notes of preaching on Education Sunday. The following are brief suggestions of sermon texts and material:

1. AN EDUCATION WORTH HAVING

"And all thy children shall be taught of Jehovah; and great shall be the peace of thy children" (Isa. 54:13).

Note the general character of this education; it is for *all*. As a nation cannot exist half slave and half free; so a nation cannot exist and progress into happiness half ignorant and half educated.

But true education is more than knowledge of the facts of the natural world. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov. 9:10).

The result of education founded in the knowledge of God is peace. The permanent happiness of all the nations of earth will finally be secured when they come to know one another in relation to the common Father of humanity.

2. TAUGHT THE SUPREME LESSON

"For ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another; for indeed ye do it toward all the brethren in all Macedonia" (Thess. 4:9, 10).

Note the significance of the single word *God-taught* (*θεοδιδασκτοι*) as describing a true Christian. We are the disciples or learners of God.

We have a great Teacher. The wisest man cannot reveal the meaning of life to us as God can do.

We have a great truth. It is the greatest of lessons to learn how to live. We may

not be able to master all the books; but we must learn to master ourselves.

We have a great brotherhood. The fellowship of all those who are disciples of the Father is a wonderful bond of unity to keep human hearts together. All Macedonia finally must include all the world.

3. LEARNING AND DOING

Teach me thy ways, O Jehovah; I will walk in thy truth" (Ps. 86:11).

First comes the task of learning. We must be taught what the ways of God are in order to live right. This means the giving of truth on God's part and the learning of truth on ours. This is not knowledge for itself alone; it is for the purpose of life.

Second comes action, in which the truth that we have learned is put into practice. We *walk* in it; that is, it becomes a rule of life for daily duty. And action in the line of truth makes it easier to acquire more truth.

4. TIME, THE TEACHER

"I said, Days should speak,
And multitude of years should teach
wisdom" (Job 32:7).

The courses in the University of Life are long and hard. They cannot be quickly mastered. We shall lose all our courage unless we take time into our reckoning. Thus time becomes a great teacher.

Only truth that has been thus mastered and tested is worth while. Truth needs to be wrestled for and pondered in order to relate itself to life.

Therefore we gain patience and self-control in the process of learning life's lessons. We begin to appreciate the patience of God.

Thus we acquire sympathy for those who are still learning life's lessons. We remember what it cost us to learn from Time, the Teacher, and therefore we are patient with others.

Preaching on Rally Sunday

It has become the custom to set apart a day for rallying the forces of the church to the work of the year on a Sunday in the early autumn. The program for public service on this Sunday will be varied; but in almost every case the sermon must be prepared as a summons of the people to the practical engagements of the church year.

The mood of hope and courage will mark this sermon. While difficulties will not be overlooked, they will be displayed as obstacles to be overcome, therefore challenging the faith and action of the church, not as grounds for despair. The modern minister must be courageous, in any event; but especially when he stands before his people to point out the objects of noble endeavor in the community for the year in prospect.

It is a fine occasion on which to point out specifically and positively some of the items in the church program for the year. Definite lines of service to be undertaken call out the enthusiasm of the people. It is not enough to call the congregation to register their general willingness to serve; they ought to be shown some of the actual engagements of the year and how they can bear their part in carrying them out. Therefore, this sermon may be definite and concrete.

The preacher may rally to his support the great promises of the Bible and the noble examples of those who have done brave deeds for God. For example, a fine preparation of mind and mood for this sermon is to read carefully again the Book of Nehemiah and see this great leader as he stands out in all his rugged

faith. He dared to undertake the building of a ruined city in the strength of God. Or one may turn to the character of Mary Slessor, or the work of Wilfred Grenfell, and find stirring examples of the way in which men and women who have dared to believe in God have accomplished the apparently impossible in Africa and Labrador. The secret of success in the modern community in America is no different.

The appeal for co-operation is the final note of a sermon on Rally Sunday. The minister cannot do it alone; the people cannot do it alone; it is an enterprise that demands the most friendly and constant co-operation. The preacher will ask for this in full expectation that it will be forthcoming. And generally it will; for the people are ready to work when once they see what is to be done. Congregations seldom fail their leaders when they are trusted and shown the way to help.

I. FORWARD!

"Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward" (Exod. 14:15).

The living church must be a growing church; it must press forward into new enterprises. The advance will call for heroic decision; but the rewards and promises of divine help are attractive and sustaining.

Forward out of the old! The past must be left behind as it is built upon. Estimate the resources of the church.

Forward into the new! Define some of the lines of advance in the church program and call for service.

Forward under the Great Commander! We do not move alone. Christ is with his church. He knows the problems and the resources. The new year must bring the church nearer Christ.

2. BUILDING WALLS

"So we built the wall . . . for the people had a mind to work" (Neh. 4:6).

The fallen walls indicate the extent and vital importance of the task that is before the church. They must be restored before the community will be safe and happy; the church must rebuild them.

The rebuilt walls stand for the final success of the church as it attacks its great problem. The work has not yet been accomplished; but all the promises and resources of God are assurances of its final completion.

The secret of all success is revealed here. The leaders did not do it all; the people did not; but both together achieved success. The purpose of the working people was the assurance of the achieving church.

3. A GREAT PROMISE

"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

The church always has been a "little flock" as compared with the great world. It is now. In point of numbers and apparent power it seems unable to cope with the world-situation.

But it is through such a small and devoted group that God can work for the redemption of the world. This has been proved repeatedly in the course of history.

The end of the church's activity is the establishing of God's Kingdom on earth. There is a great achievement to match the apparent weakness of the church.

The good will of God is the chief reliance of the church as it undertakes the tasks that come with each new year. Many other items enter into the year's program; but the promises of God are of supreme importance.

Preaching on Prison Sunday

The recognition of Prison Sunday is not so general as is the case concerning

the other days in the catalogue which we are considering; but it has come into current usage enough and is so worthy of observance that we include it here.

The whole subject of crime and its care has grown into the consciousness of the church and the study of the preacher rapidly within the last few years. The Bible gives much space to the subject of the prisoner. Christians are coming to see that the words "I was in prison, and ye came unto me" involve a necessary item in the practice of the Christian life. Although one seldom hears prisoners mentioned in the prayers offered in public worship even yet, there is nevertheless a growing interest in them.

The difficulty of preaching appropriately on Prison Sunday grows out of the fact that the majority of preachers have had very little experience in prison work and do not therefore have any large amount of personal knowledge of the world in which persons deprived of their liberty for the cause of crime think and act. The sermon is in danger of being a quite artificial utterance, addressed to those who are deeply satisfied that they are out of prison by one who never has been in and knows practically nothing about the subject.

Therefore it is necessary to take every precaution in the effort to avoid unreality and sentimentality in preaching on Prison Sunday. It is necessary to keep in mind all the while one is preparing the sermon that prisoners are human beings and that there were actual causes of the crimes for which they are suffering penalty. The preacher's mood must involve both severity against evil-doing and sympathy for the weakness of

a human being that has led him into crime.

Then it must be clear that the purpose of punishment is reformation. Society does not deprive the prisoner of his liberty in order to inflict vengeance upon him; the purpose of imprisonment is the restoration of the prisoner to himself and to society. This large hope and trust in the possibility of the worst man to be returned to the service of the commonwealth must lie in the background of all our thinking as we preach on Prison Sunday.

1. OUT OF PRISON

"Bring my soul out of prison,
That I may give thanks unto thy name"
(Ps. 142:7).

The release of prisoners that is desirable is not accomplished by the indulgent action of a generous pardoning board. It comes from the breaking of the soul's bondage to sin and evil habit. This is the gift of God.

The soul is in prison before the body is jailed. The great prison house is sin. It shackles the spirit in the bonds of wicked habits.

God can bring the soul out of prison. This great reformation is Christian salvation. When a prisoner takes Christ as his Master he prepares the only sure way of final release. He thereby escapes not only the results of sin but the sin also.

The act of praise is the true recognition of the soul's release. A singing heart helps keep one from doing wrong. We ought to thank God most of all for his great redemption.

2. SONGS IN A CELL

"And about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing unto God, and the prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25).

Suffering imprisonment unjustly, awake at midnight, in a wretched cell, Paul and Silas had all the conditions tending to make them angry and sullen.

But the consciousness of their integrity and their faith in Christ made them sing in the prison. A good conscience pitches the tune of a midnight song.

The prisoners heard them. It was a thrilling testimony of faith. It must have made the prisoners want to know the God who could make their comrades in suffering sing in the night.

The faith of Paul and Silas is the only power that will keep us out of peril of prison and bring us finally into liberty in case we suffer unjustly.

3. THE EMANCIPATOR

"He hath sent me to proclaim release to
the captives,
And recovering of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty them that are bruised,
To proclaim the acceptable year of the
Lord" (Luke 4:18 [Isa. 61:1]).

Christ is the great Emancipator, not only to those who are in actual bondage for crime but for all who suffer from and for sin. Three classes are described:

Those imprisoned by sin. This is a bondage more terrible than any imposed by the state.

Those bruised by evil. Nothing hurts so deeply and so seriously as sin.

Those blinded by error. Wrongdoing of all kinds brings us into darkness; it takes away the power to see clearly.

All these classes may be rescued and restored by Christ. They may come into the welcome year of the Lord out of the unwelcome years of their prison service.

4. CHRIST IN PRISON

"I was in prison, and ye came unto me"
(Matt. 25:36).

The Christian churches have sadly neglected their duty to prisoners in the

past. They have paid chaplains to do what Jesus said was a common Christian duty. This includes not only those who are in jail but all who are imprisoned by sin.

The church must "come" to the prisoner. He cannot go to it. This may involve the doing of an unwelcome duty by certain individuals; but it is the command of Christ.

Jesus said that to do this to a prisoner is to do it to him. If Christ were where we could do something for him we would be eager to make any possible sacrifice. When we place Christ in the prisoner's place we shall be as eager to visit him.

Preaching on Thanksgiving Day

Either on the Sunday preceding Thanksgiving Day, or in a service on the day itself a sermon on the appropriate subject will generally be called for. The religious service on Thanksgiving Day itself is often in union with other churches. In any event the sermon will deal with the grounds of gratitude and the ways in which it may be expressed in individual and community life.

Fundamental to all preaching of Thanksgiving Day is a revaluation of the obligation on the part of man to be grateful for the good gifts of God. This mood is expressed with remarkable depth and vividness in the Psalms. Thankfulness is revealed there as one of the primary factors in religion. We tend to accept the gifts of the earth with no reference of them to the Giver.

But gratitude is one of the fine marks of a Christian. As it plays a chief part in our relations with our kinsmen and friends, so it is vital to religion. Without a deep sense of gratitude the religious life becomes hard and coarse. It is necessary to "count your blessings" and

then give thanks to the boundless Source of them all.

Another chief factor in preaching on Thanksgiving Day is the consciousness of the rich gifts of our nation and a sense of the responsibility that rests upon us to use them well for the service of God and men. It is possible to take stock of the wealth of America and then rest back in smug satisfaction at it and proceed to enjoy it. But the inevitable conclusion to be derived from the possession of gifts is the responsibility for their wise use. Just because America is so rich and powerful the obligation to use her wealth and strength for the welfare of all the nations of earth is paramount. It is possible to stress this fact on Thanksgiving Day to the immense profit of true patriotism.

There may be such conditions in the community as to warrant the appeal for definite institutions or programs for the highest good of the commonwealth. In that case the sermon may be devoted to such a practical discussion. Out of such an appeal has come in more than one instance new resources for community charity and even the establishment of a philanthropy which was first defined in the Thanksgiving Day sermon.

I. AN OLD-TIME THANKSGIVING DAY

"Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye grieved; for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10).

Thanksgiving Day is a holy day as well as a holiday. It is not observed primarily as a day of eating and merriment. It is also a time when we think through the deeper relations of life and take new starts.

But the home feast is a part of it. To eat the fat and drink the sweet is one way in which to express our love and thanks to God.

The grace of charity must be exercised and portions sent to the needy. The gift without the giver is bare; and so it is necessary to do something more than merely send a gift. It is a day for personal calls and the sharing of life.

Universal happiness ought to mark the day. Not only in families but throughout the nation it should be a day of joy.

The real source of the strength in which we rejoice is God. Thanksgiving Day must never leave God out. The purpose of the day is to bring us nearer one another because we have come closer to our heavenly Father.

2. GOD'S GOODNESS TO AMERICA

"He hath not dealt so with any nation" (Ps. 147:20).

Discuss first the signs of God's wonderful dealing with America. In its natural resources; in its great history; in its blending of races; in its strategic position among the nations of the earth.

Then point out the opportunity of America: in its power to unite the peoples of the earth; in the influence of its democracy and religion upon the world; in its peculiar privilege of leading in the building up of God's Kingdom.

3. MANIFOLD THANKSGIVING

"Giving thanks always for all things" (Eph. 5:20).

There is danger that we shall express our gratitude only on certain days and for certain blessings. Against this limited idea of Thanksgiving Day the text indicates two enlargements:

Always.—Thanksgiving must become a permanent temper of the spirit. Not only on the great days but on all the days we are to show our gratitude for God's gifts.

This makes daily life rich and happy. It is a constant testimony to our reverence and love.

For everything.—We must not be grateful merely for that which we like or want. It is also necessary to be grateful for what God sends us even if we did not choose it. Sometimes there is more cause for gratitude in the fact that something was withheld than in the granting of our desires.

4. THANKSGIVING DAY DUTIES

"O give thanks unto Jehovah, call upon his name;

Make known his doings among the peoples" (I Chron. 16:8).

Give thanks.—The most obvious of all duties on such a day. We give thanks not only by what we say but also by what we do. Our words and acts are important; our whole temper is still more a proof of our gratitude.

Worship God.—A reverent life is another way of showing our thanks to God. When we call upon his name we do not simply ask God for what we want; we also subject our whole life to him. This is an expression of gratitude also.

Bear witness.—The world comes to know God by means of the testimony of those who have found him. The best way in which to demonstrate the reality of God and his love is to show the world how God is using us in the accomplishment of his will on earth. The most valid evidence concerning God is furnished by the lives of those who are living in such union with him that their lives display his purpose and power.

Preaching on Christmas

The universal observance of Christmas, the atmosphere of good will that pervades every community, the loftiness of the theme, and the joy of giving the message of the gospel in some new accent combine to make preaching on

the Sunday preceding Christmas Day one of the outstanding privileges of the Christian ministry.

The best general preparation for the Christmas sermon lies in vivifying the story in imagination until all the wonderful details of it as they are given in the Gospels stand out clearly in their graphic beauty. Certainly as one reads again the narrative its sincerity and genuineness must be vivid and commanding. No forger would have put his story so simply and directly. It is a beautiful experience to sit again with the Gospels and let the mind play across the swiftly moving scenes and the changeful moods of the story as it is told from different points of view.

Then it is profitable to renew one's appreciation of the doctrine of the incarnation. Remember how Phillips Brooks constantly centered his preaching about this fundamental Christian truth. The fact that God entered into human life and expressed himself in the person and experience of Jesus so clearly that all we need to know of the Father we can discover in the Christ is a mighty fact when once it takes hold on us. No preacher can stand in the presence of that august truth and not feel himself quickened to more profound thought and urgent speech by the compulsion of it. It is a sublime and precious fact. To proclaim and explain it is a privilege.

One of the problems in connection with preaching at Christmas is the cramping of time for the sermon on account of the amount of music that is generally made a part of the order of public worship of that day. The sermon will have to be shortened in many cases;

but the preacher ought to have adequate time for his message. Twenty-five minutes at least ought to be available for the sermon. If the laws of condensation are observed it will be possible to preach with satisfactory completeness in this space of time.

Let the Christmas sermon put the real message of the day in as fresh forms as may be found. It is too great an occasion for merely obvious remarks. The story of Christmas is so familiar and the truth enshrined in it has been stated so often that fresh forms are difficult to find; but they will come out of the preacher's earnest study and thought and the Christmas message will have a new ring in it.

1. GOOD NEWS AT CHRISTMAS

"Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people: for there is born unto you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10, 11).

Good news to all the world.—The happiest message that ever has been given the world is the evangel of Christmas. It tells of victory over sin, of hope for every hard and bitter day, of power to live an endless life. It is for all the world. It never has reached the world yet. It is our duty to give it to the world.

A Savior and Lord.—This good news gathers about a Person. He is the Savior from sin. Through faith in him we attain the power to conquer evil. He is a Lord and Master, whose service is perfect freedom and in whose comradeship we conquer every enemy of the soul.

2. GOD'S CHRISTMAS GIFT

"But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem

them that were under the law, that they might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4, 5).

God takes time to bring his plans into fulfilment. The great gift was not given until God knew that the right time had come. His patience is boundless.

Christ came into our human experience in order that he might show us how the children of God are to live. His God is ours. He reveals us to ourselves. His life sets forth our normal life.

Redemption is the issue of the Christmas gift of God. There is something done for us that makes us able to conquer sin and death.

3. THE CHRISTMAS PEACE SONG

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men in whom he is well pleased" (Luke 2:14).

The world is the place in which the glory of God is to be revealed and realized. God's glory is in his love and purpose. In so far as we realize the love and the purpose of God we are bringing honor to him and making the great Christmas song real.

The world is the place in which peace is to be realized. But this will not come by acts of legislatures. Peace comes only to and through those who enjoy the good pleasure of God. It is when men and

women meet the expectations of the divine good will that peace may be assured among the warring nations. Therefore the best way to bring peace on earth is to unite all men in a league of love and service which will merit the divine approval.

4. OUR CHRISTMAS TRIBUTE

"And they came into the house and saw the young child with Mary his mother; and they fell down and worshipped him; and opening their treasures they offered unto him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh" (Matt. 1:11).

We bring our worship and tribute to the Mother and Child on every Christmas Day. What is it to be today?

Gold.—That is the gift for a king. Christ is the true King of all loyal Christians. He has the right to reign over us. His will is our royal law.

Frankincense.—It is the gift for worship. It stands for the reverent adoration which we render to Christ on this Christmas Day. It is his due. He is worthy of all that our hearts can render of love and loyalty.

Myrrh.—It was used for the burial of the body. It represents the divine sacrifice of our Lord. We bring him our Christmas gratitude for his sacrificial life and death. By it we are shown the will of God and saved from our sins.

NOTE.—In following articles the remainder of the special occasions will be taken up, and also the program of a year's preaching on a great subject will be given.